Refuge as a Site for Understanding:

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Arguments for and against affording U.S. war resisters asylum in Canada have again found their way into the literature, the media, and are gaining recognition for topics of research. Asylum opponents have reasoned that these men and women chose to enlist and should therefore be obliged to live up to their contracts in the service of their country, even if they are being repeatedly deployed for want of new enlistees in a war that has lost the support of the general public. Affording deserters a safe haven in Canada, amounts to tacit agreement that desertion is a permissible form of dissent, and likely to pique the elephant to the south with whom Canadians have had a long-standing relationship, founded upon a degree of shared values, a notion of reciprocity, and important collaborative agreements that have historically been of considerable mutual benefit.

Supporters for giving war resisters refuge have countered with how enlisting in the U.S. armed forces is less a choice and more a last resort for many to escape debt (the poverty or back-door draft as some have called it), and a means for educational opportunities and medical benefits not otherwise within their reach. For some who seek legal residency in the U.S., enlisting has been held up as a means to obtain residence and even citizenship if one agreed to serve one's country. Supporters have also pointed out how armed forces' recruiters beguile youngsters into joining, making false promises about what they would be doing, for how long, and where they would serve. Many accounts have detailed how young recruiters would seek out and repeatedly engage students -even while still in high school- with promises of a brighter future if they signed up. To meet declining quotas as the war in Iraq worsened, recruiters have reportedly tempted these young men and women with increasingly attractive sign-up bonuses, including cash upfront, funds for college, and promising careers that many could only dream about (Joyner, 2005).

Shaped by its unique historical beginnings, it is also true that Canada has navigated a

different course from the U.S. on important political matters that characterized both its national and international policies. Not deploying troops to join the Americans in their invasion of Iraq is often mentioned as a recent illustration. From the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, Canada chanced an independent course as well in accepting tens of thousands of war resisters from the U.S., etched within a liberal politic that the country could also be a refuge from militarism (Hagan, 2001). Moreover, there is good evidence that such divergence exists not only within crafted public policy, but is more deeply entrenched within beliefs and ideals of ordinary Americans and Canadians. Pulse-taking from both sides of the border suggest, for example, the former are more primed for individual achievement, with a strong proclivity of deference to traditional authority and institutions, while Canadians appear to be moving towards a more critical or skeptical view of conformity with a balanced notion of individual autonomy, tempered by a sense of collective responsibility (Adams, 2003). With such differences, it is only natural and right for Canada to steer its own sovereign course argue those who defend taking those risks.

Finally, proponents of amnesty for U.S. deserters have pointed to soldiers' accounts for refusing an order to deploy to a combat zone because their government betrayed them by violating the very Constitution they swore to uphold. The invasion of Iraq was never given sanction by the United Nations and was met with international condemnation because it violated international law and the United Nations Charter that has the highest statutory meaning for the U.S. through its signed treaties and covenants. Since Canada is also a signatory to the same international agreements, it has a legal and moral obligation to abide by them even if the elephant goes astray. Moreover, the reasons for going to war turned out to be unsubstantiated or even fabricated as were the stories that spurred America to justify the Vietnam war (Lindorf & Olshansky, 2006; War Resisters Support Campaign, 2007, Courage to Resist, 2008).

Since that invasion, the mounting evidence of repeated and routine abuse and killing of civilians in Iraq as well as the mistreatment of detainees rounded up by Americans and their coalition allies, has additionally strengthened a resolve for those in the U.S. armed forces to break rank and make a claim for conscientious objection. The essence of that claim is to refuse any complicity with immoral acts for which soldiers can and have been held accountable as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Hence, the point is made how men and women in the U.S. armed forces are increasingly finding themselves in an untenable situation: become accomplices to crime, live with the ghosts of their inhumane acts for the rest of their lives and possibly face

formal sanction later, or face consequences now for refusing an order to participate in illegal and immoral conduct (BBC News, 2006).

This paper examines the last of these arguments to first make the case how leaving military service in the face of impending sanction may be seen as an act of courage that is exemplary of only the "exceptional" person; and, secondly, how such persons may in fact possess significant information to help us understand a complex human phenomenon: why good people decline doing bad things. That would include not remaining silent about abuse that is happening under the radar of a nation's mainstream media. The war resister or the whistle-blower may be that unusual person who has succeeded in removing himself (herself) from a toxic situation by overcoming both the pressures to conform to authority and the fears associated with any subsequent consequences for challenging it.

War Resisters' Accounts: Heroic Narratives

Legal historian John Hagan (2001) in his seminal work titled Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada wrote how between 1967 and 1973 the Canadian Immigration Act provided war resisters an opportunity to live a life free from militarism without facing persecution for evading such service. For many, the chance to immigrate to Canada not only gave sanctuary, but it afforded the basis of sustained antiwar and continuing social activism. Hagan argued how dissent of this sort may in fact reflect rational and responsible behaviour, introducing purposeful, highly significant turning points into human lives. He provides examples in his detailed accounts of such behaviour, the reasoning behind it, and its profound implications. I would take this one step further in proposing that war resisters in our midst provide us with a unique opportunity to learn what social scientists have identified as a crucial need for further exploration: Why is it that some persons will refrain from behviour that is abusive, morally or ethically wrong and unprovoked, while most of us would fail to do so in spite of a moral upbringing and a pro-social lifestyle?

An important question regarding the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal (Danner, 2004; Hersh, 2004) may serve as an example. If the abuse of the detainees was not merely the product of "a few bad apples on the night shift" as the Bush administration would have us believe, and more likely the result of numerous contextual, systemic factors –a "bad barrel" so to speak- then

how is it that some took part while others refused? The answers suggested by the research addressing this query is that we need to consider combined personal and situational factors. I propose that it is the whistle-blowers and "deserters" who may well be counted amongst those who can relate such person-in-situation accounts. Stories from persons who have resolved to abide by their convictions based on critical thinking, compassion for others, and mindful of the possible consequences of their actions (or inactions), may hold the very answers we seek to further our understanding about why some become accomplices and others resist forces that drive our behaviour.

While it may appear anomalous to consider a deserter as hero, a fuller definition of heroism that includes the notions of fortitude, endurance, intrepidity and tenacity (besides bravery and courage) permits the consideration of varying types of persons who might be heroic whether they be trained professionals in the line of duty such as police officers, firefighters and paramedics, or ordinary civilians from all walks of life. The expanded definition is inclusive of military, physical-risk cases (with threats to life or limb) as well as civil heroism where the risk extends to everything from one's career, social and economic well-being to imprisonment, ostracism, and banishment (Zimbardo, 2007).

We can attempt to give at least a preliminary response to the question posed by examining several classic human behaviour experiments conducted at Yale University in the early 1960s, and at Stanford University a decade later. To develop our response further, we draw upon the research on intimate partner violence (IPV) to shed light on the far-reaching implications of state-sanctioned "specialized interrogation procedures" (also euphemistically referred to as "torture lite") that have included simulated drowning or waterboarding of "terror" suspects to extract information and confessions. In making such references, we attempt to connect the dots between sanctioned behaviour in the private and public domains by employing the sociological imagination and invoking both a micro and macro perspective.

A Theoretical Framework

Whether we try to comprehend violence perpetrated in the home or by a government, a comprehensive, ecological framework is arguably an effective approach for doing so. As Edleson and Tolman (1992) have proposed, with references to Bronfenbrenner (1977), a range of interacting factors from the mesosystem and exosystem to the macrosystem all need to be

considered for understanding the complexity of human behaviour –in particular where violence enters the equation. While personal, predisposing factors play a role in why a man abuses his partner (his psychological make-up), it is the socio-political and cultural environment that reinforces it on a societal level (for example, strong patriarchal systems and strong proclivity for deference to traditional authority) (Gondolf, 1997; Tolman, 1992). In reviewing theories of woman abuse, Dekeseredy and MacLeod (1997) convincingly argue that contemporary sociological theories such as male peer support, routine activities, social learning, and feminist perspectives have far more explanatory value than individualistic or non-sociological accounts. Examining the challenges we face in our growing and diverse societies, Sandercock (2006) provides compelling illustrations how influences from our socio-political environment apply similarly with regards to race. When a ruling politician fails to counter overt racism arising in his multicultural riding, for example, it informs all citizens that they may also target the same identifiable group with relative impunity.

Human Behaviour Experiments and Lessons from the Battered Women's Movement

The belief that one can practice a wide range of coercive techniques on detainees to exert full control over them without descent into the deepest recesses of human cruelty was implicit in a set of instructions given to randomly selected subjects in a mock prison study known as the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) (Zimbardo, 1972) that set out to investigate the effects of imprisonment. Those randomly selected as "prisoners" lost their liberty, civil rights, independence and privacy, and those who became "guards" gained social power by accepting the responsibility for controlling and managing the lives of their dependent charges. Principal investigator, Dr. Philip Zimbardo, advised those role-playing guards that they had to maintain control over the prisoners by any means short of resorting to physical violence. However, the notion that "mild" permissible abuse to exert control over others might be practiced with restraint soon proved to be baseless. Within less than a week, those persons in the role of guards who were given such liberties resorted to abusive behaviours on a scale that forced the immediate termination of the SPE. From the outset, it can be seen that the SPE was based on a false premise that has also been a major point of contention in the field of interpersonal violence, specifically intimate partner violence (IPV).

Dekeseredy and Hinch (1991), amongst others, wrote how considerable disagreement

about what harmful acts should be evaluated and included in definitions of wife abuse characterized the literature and research for many years. For example, a Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was developed in the 1970s by University of New Hampshire sociologist Murray Straus to study violence within families and soon became the most widely used instrument in the field to measure incidence and prevalence Straus, 1979). But, as many have noted, the CTS rank ordered behaviors in a linear fashion, from least serious to most serious which incorrectly assumed that psychological abuse and some physical acts such as slaps were always less injurious than the items in the severe violence index. A hierarchy of abuse was mistakenly constructed around the notion that physical aggression was always more "severe" than other forms. However, over time, a consensus evolved on how research inclusive of the testimony of battered women over the decades provided ample evidence how psychological or emotional abuse was at least as destructive as any physical assault (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Smith, 1987). In response to major issues with the CTS, numerous other measures were subsequently developed to more accurately and comprehensively evaluate IPV, including the CTS2 (Straus et al. 10)

Thirty-five years after the SPE was launched on the false assumption of a lesser / greater abuse script, "rigorous" interrogation techniques were legitimized by the U.S. Government under the Bush administration's newest policies in the war on terror. Astoundingly, absolute bans on torture enshrined in universal covenants and accords have now been reformulated in U.S. law. Torture no longer includes mental or psychological abuse, sensory disorientation, and even self-inflicted pain generated through lengthy and forced stress positions. Intelligence interrogators are given explicit permission to freely employ harsh methods of persuasion with impunity, providing only that pain is not so severe or prolonged as to result in vital organ failure or death of the prisoner (Bilton, 2007). Americans in uniforms and even private contractors sent to the war zones to service the military's vast infrastructure are expected to carry out a mission that would lead them to implicitly or explicitly mistreat detainees. These detainees have even included minors and are often randomly rounded up in house-to-house raids based on bad intelligence likely obtained through mistreatment of other detainees or even by persons who seek revenge on others for sectarian reasons (Laufer 2006, Key 2007). Testimony from soldiers and human rights organizations have identified the treatment as "special" interrogation techniques consisting of prolonged isolation, stress induced positions, sleep deprivation, extreme temperature variations, and other sensor-disorientation (manipulating and assaulting the human senses) with orders

emanating from the highest levels of the current U.S. administration (Hersh 2004, Laufer 2006).

A second classic study of human behaviour relevant in any project to understand why ordinary and seemingly good people will commit horrendous acts is the Stanley Milgram experiment conducted at Yale University in 1961 (Milgram, (1963). Subjects were recruited to supposedly test the effects of punishment on learning. They were instructed to give electric shocks to a "learner" (who was actually an actor) each time he gave a wrong answer. It had been predicted that only a small percentage of the subjects would increase the voltage as high as 400, but with only small prompts from the principal scientist conducting the study, as many as 60 percent actually inflicted shocks at high levels even with groans and cries from the learner. Milgram, who had been motivated to learn why people behave in inhumane ways after the World War II death camp revelations, concluded that a situation can be so powerful that it will persuade most of us to follow the directives of our superiors, to defer to traditional authority, in this case the scientist in the white coat. What he also learned was that it was less likely a person would inflict pain when the victim was closer (in the same room with the subject pressing the electric shock levers), when one can see and hear the cries of the victim. The more one depersonalizes, objectifies and dehumanizes the opponent, the easier it is to inflict the pain. Milgram was astounded by his findings, leading him to conclude that he could find enough personnel to run a Nazi death camp in any middle-size American town. Here again we can learn from the field of intimate partner violence regarding what conditions will most likely facilitate abusive behaviour.

Information gleaned from the field of IPV is congruent with reports by those who have extensively studied interrogation procedures. Darius Rejali in his book titled Torture and Democracy (2007) reveals how torture "lite" is actually an oxymoron because the distinction made between "physical" and "non-physical" coercive techniques is patently false. He also notes that abuse that leaves no physical scars (which may include simulated drowning and electric shock) is practiced much more often in democracies where state conduct is subject to more public view than in autocratic, despotic regimes. In democracies it becomes therefore more imperative for torturers not to leave actual marks on the human body. He notes how sleep deprivation, for instance, affects one's judgments as well as one's physical condition. Sleep deprivation we know produces sharp pains in muscular joints, starting with one's legs and going all the way up. It also makes one extremely sensitive to chemical heat and electrical stimuli, so all other tortures hurt more when one has less sleep.

This is precisely what battered women have also testified to in so many cases where intimate partners carefully chose what forms of coercive measures they would employ to exert their control over them. The abuse happens most often behind closed doors away from the public's eye, and it is often administered in ways that escape legal prosecution where legislation for assault is finally being enforced in both the private and public domain. Moreover, one can strike a victim many times in a way that would not leave any marks but it would clearly be a mistake to call one technique psychological and the other physical (Dekeseredy & MacLeod, 1997; Edleson & Tolman (1992).

Alfred McCoy, in his book titled A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation From the Cold War to the War on Terror (2006), reveals how psychological research at McGill University conducted decades ago proved that a state of psychosis can be induced within 48 hours through denied sensory stimulation that first leads to hallucinations and then ultimately complete breakdown. Neurologists under contract from the C.I.A. at Cornell University Medical Center studied Soviet K.G.B. torture techniques where they found the most effective way to extract confessions or other information. By having the prisoner stand with arms outstretched for a day or two, fluids flow down to the legs, the legs swell, lesions form, they erupt, they separate, hallucinations start, and the kidneys shut down. The pain is excruciating, yet no one has been beaten and the detainee is simply told that he is bringing this on to himself because he refuses to cooperate and that he can sit down if he confesses. McCoy points to the iconic pictures of prisoner abuse from Abu Ghraib with men hooded, arms extended, and short-shackled as evidence that this is systemic, state-sanctioned abuse employing the combined techniques of sensory disorientation and self-inflicted pain –the basis of C.I.A. interrogation techniques to fight terror condoned by the Bush administration at least since 2005.

Lessons from the field of intimate partner violence are again pertinent and instructive here. Ptacek (1988) discusses in detail what sorts of excuses and justifications, standardized within cultures, have made it possible for men to abuse their wives. If we are given directives from legitimized authority and the message is that we are not accountable for our behaviour, we have the necessary rationalizations to commit the abuse. When Vice President Dick Cheney and former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld issued directives that interrogators have license to go to "the dark side" in order to extract wanted information from detainees, that social approval was granted. To insure C.I.A. interrogators could not be prosecuted for crimes against

humanity or war crimes, legislation was drafted to virtually exonerate any interrogator from any acts of torture both by redefining abuse to exclude a wide array of psychological violence, and to give legal impunity for the commission of abuse by any interrogator whose intent was not to inflict pain for its own sake. In other words, agency for the commission of violence was removed so long as one's intention was honourable the means justifying the ends (Danner, 2004; Lindorf & Olshansky, 2006).

Towards a Pedagogy of the Oppressor

As intriguing as these studies are, and from all that they have taught us, social scientists studying moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character continue to search for answers to better understand how it is that most of us fall prey to situational factors allowing for abusive conduct, while an exceptional few, the heroes, overcome whatever it is that stands in the way of their determined non-collaboration, their ability to resist the rewards of conformity. In Philip Zimbardo's most recent work, The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil (2007), the author provides a ten-step program -gleaned from what was learned by the Milgram experiment and its replicates- to resist unwanted influences so we may be that resolute person, the hero who overcomes those situational forces that lead the rest of us to the heart of darkness, given particular circumstances. With an expanded definition of what heroism is all about based on a comprehensive definition of heroic acts, Zimbardo applies the criteria of his new taxonomy not only to professionals in uniform such as Pvt. Joe Darby who blew the whistle on the Abu Ghraib abuses, but also to "ordinary" civilians, including Christina Maslach, the young woman who forced him to terminate his SP experiment when he proudly showed her his videos of what was taking place in the basement of the converted psychology lab at Stanford University. It includes the good samaritan who rescued the Holocaust victims, those who disclosed the financial scandals at Enron, and the underdogs like Rosa Parks who refused to give up her seat to a white man in 1955, precipitating the historical Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama, which in turn led to the Supreme Court's decision that outlawed segregation in American public transit.

Interestingly, Zimbardo's (2007) new taxonomy of 12 different types of heroes with exemplars and criteria along with his ten-step program is entirely congruent with a myriad of curricula developed over the decades by therapists, victims' advocates, social activists and researchers concerned with IPV offenders and the development of effective interventions. Included in such IPV programs is a strategic task of accountability, the act of the offender accurately naming and owning abusive and controlling behaviours, developing a personal responsibility plan on how to avoid situations that lead to abuse, looking after one's needs (self-awareness and self-care), and identifying one's strengths and past successes at overcoming those "scripts" that facilitated the abuse (Augusta-Scott & Dankwort, 2002; Dankwort & Austin, 1999; Gondolf, 1997).

The published or oral accounts of war resisters who have come to Canada in the past and those who continue to come seeking a safe place to live peacefully in line with sound moral and ethical principles, may well provide us with answers why some are successful in declining the call to go to the dark side. Philip Zimbardo's taxonomy of persons and his prescription on how we can resist unwanted influences, combined with what we have learned from the developed curricula of IPV offender programs, serve as a basis for an enhanced and broader anti-violence curriculum, a pedagogy for the oppressor (targeting the consciousness of the offender), much as Paulo Freire (1970), the renowned Brazilian educator, developed a pedagogy of the oppressed (targeting the victim). It follows that the accumulated knowledge from these respective fields will also serve us well to develop hypotheses and research questions for additional study.

We need to develop and equip persons who can overcome both the proclivities that draw us into violence with our intimate partners as well as those forces that call on us to participate in human rights violations on behalf of the state. We already have the written and oral accounts from resisters such as Joshua Key (2007) and the stories of many others both from the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Courage to Resist, 2008; Laufer, 2006, Mason, 2007; Soldier Say No, 2008) as well as the previous war in Vietnam (e.g. Hagan, 2001; Haig-Brown, 1996; Ziegler, 2006). The histories and experiences of war resisters along with their testimony of witnessing and, in some instances participating in, crimes against humanity (e.g., Hedges & Al-Arian, 2007), offer us a unique window of discovery and understanding. Within each new story lie the

potential answers we require. With that added knowledge, we will be in a stronger position to help teach others how to stay on a higher moral path, overcoming those inducements that lead us to commit evil acts for the state or within our own families.

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